



The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network



Report

HOW TO INSPIRE, HIRE AND GROW DIVERSE TALENT

2022

A practical guide for business



Supported by :



TOOLKIT

INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT: HOW TO INSPIRE, HIRE & GROW DIVERSE TALENT

This toolkit provides practical guidance to help businesses inspire future talent, recruit inclusively and provide an enabling work environment to help employees thrive.

FOREWORD

In February 2020, Business in the Community (BITC) published a practical toolkit on how to support candidates from disadvantaged groups built around our employment framework of *Inspire, Hire, Grow*.

One month later, the Covid-19 pandemic began, imposing significant and long-lasting changes on the world of work. In the UK, it led to a rise in long-term unemployment, a shrinking labour market, and skills shortages across every sector.ⁱ

Unsurprisingly, many of the people most affected were those who were already experiencing barriers to work pre-pandemic.

- Levels of long-term unemployment increased for olderⁱⁱ and young peopleⁱⁱⁱ
- Low-paid workers were more than twice as likely to lose their jobs as higher paid workers^{iv} and
- Unemployment increased for disabled people and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds^v

In response to the pandemic, many businesses moved their recruitment practices entirely online.

For employers, this meant they could benefit from seeing a wider range of candidates quickly and at reduced expense. But for some jobseekers with limited access to digital devices or low levels of digital skills, this made the job search even harder.

2 million people

in the UK don't have adequate access to a device and/or connectivity at home.^{vi}

Working from home became the norm for millions of people. Subsequently, many employers decided to embrace more flexible or hybrid working arrangements on a long-term basis. This was embraced positively by many in work, but for some employees – including those with mental health issues, or limited space to work at home, or new starters wanting to forge networks – being out of the office environment presented new challenges.

40%

of employers expect more than half of their workforce to work regularly from home after the pandemic has ended.^{vii}



72%

of under 25s do not have a dedicated room to work from home in and struggle to connect with colleagues.^{viii}

Recognising the impact that stress and uncertainty caused by the pandemic could have on staff, many organisations invested heavily in wellbeing and mental health support for employees.

100%↑

in UK adults experiencing some form of depression in early 2021 compared to pre-pandemic.^{ix}

84%

of employers report that there is more focus on looking after the mental health of employees in response to the pandemic.^x

As a result, the UK labour market now looks very different from how it did when we published our original toolkit. We decided it would be timely to revisit the guide to ensure that it captures the new and emerging challenges and opportunities that confront jobseekers from disadvantaged groups today.

We would like to thank JTI UK for supporting our original guide, as well as the revision of this toolkit.

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Even before Covid-19 struck, when the UK was enjoying a period of historically low unemployment, many people from disadvantaged groups were still struggling to secure good work.

- Youth unemployment was three times higher than overall employment in 2019.^{xi}
- The disability employment gap was 29.8% in 2019.^{xii}

- People from Black, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani backgrounds were twice as likely to be unemployed as white people in 2019.^{xiii}

We use the term 'disadvantaged groups' to refer to those people who are disadvantaged in the labour market because of their life experiences or background, for example, disabled people, ex-military, people with convictions, people who have experienced homelessness, long-term unemployed, older workers, refugees, survivors of modern slavery, young people and carers. This list is not exhaustive and many of these barriers are intersectional.

Businesses are key to unlocking employment opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers. Supported by JTI UK, we have brought together our knowledge and experience, with input from employers and support organisations representing disadvantaged groups, to help businesses identify what the barriers to good work are within their own organisations and to give practical solutions to help overcome them.

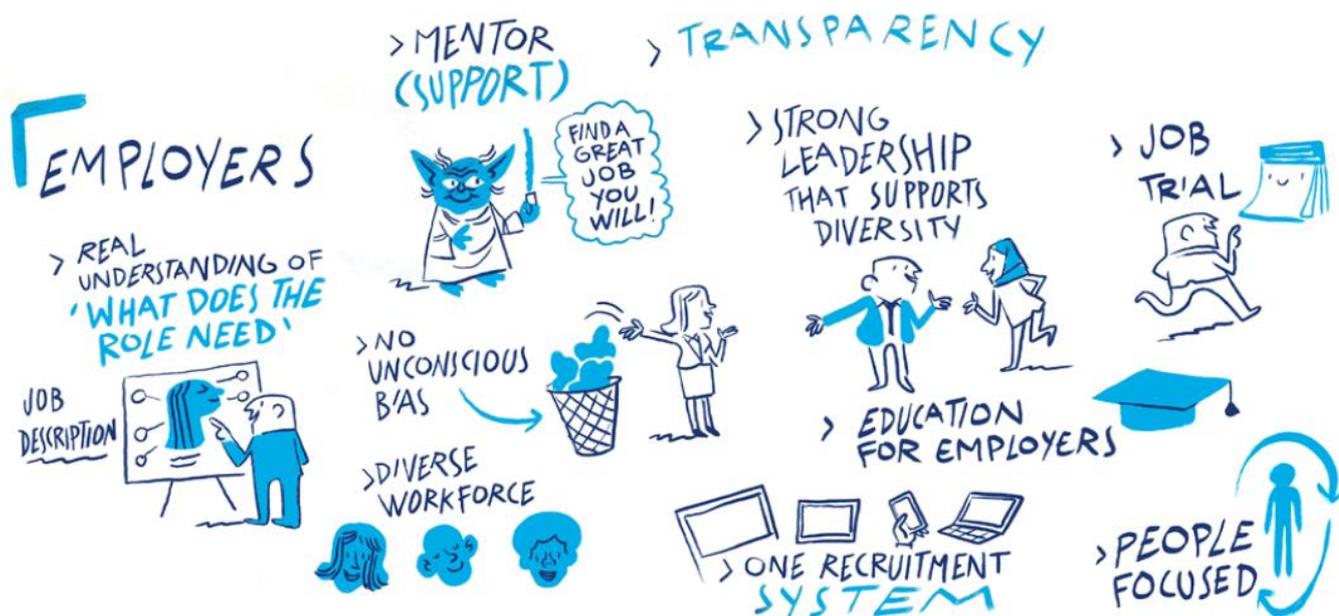
THE BITC EMPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK

The guide is structured around the BITC Employment Framework. Originally developed to support our work on youth employment, it was subsequently broadened out to help businesses think more strategically about their employment and skills offer.

The Framework identifies three distinct stages:

- **Inspire:** pre-employment support
- **Hire:** removing barriers in recruitment processes
- **Grow:** in-work support

This concept provides a broad overview of interventions that support disadvantaged groups into sustainable, good work.



What candidates want, Co-design workshop April 2019

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT

- **Addressing skills shortages:** in a tight labour market, when many employers are struggling to fill vacancies, widening your talent pool to consider candidates from disadvantaged groups is an effective way to bridge the gap.
- **Reducing recruitment costs:** working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and third sector organisations can be a cost-effective way to find talent without having to pay expensive recruitment agency fees.
- **Increasing staff retention:** finding loyal employees can bring significant savings. BITC members who employ people from disadvantaged groups report lower turnover among those groups.^{xiv}
- **Upskilling your existing workforce:** providing pre-employment or in-work support for disadvantaged groups can create volunteering opportunities for your existing workforce, helping them to gain transferable skills that will benefit your business.
- **Increasing staff engagement:** business volunteers taking part in BITC's Ready for Work programme reported a 74% increase in job satisfaction.
- **Improving client relationships and boosting corporate reputation:** a study of employers that promoted employing ex-offenders found that 65% reported this having a positive impact on their corporate reputation.^{xv}

INSPIRE

One of the most significant ways that businesses can improve employment outcomes for disadvantaged groups is by providing employability support, improving their work-readiness, and helping them to gain essential skills.

Numerous pre-employment activities have been impacted by the pandemic. For example, many businesses must consider how to deliver meaningful 'inspire' initiatives against a background of new working-from-home or hybrid models.

- Nearly two-thirds of unemployed jobseekers do not feel confident about searching and applying for work ^{xvi}
- The number of people who want and are available to work but are not actively seeking a job because they don't believe that there are any jobs for them, has increased by 61% since the start of the pandemic. ^{xvii}
- Access to Government-provided English courses can take up to three years. ^{xviii}

The table overleaf includes a list of desirable outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers and the employer interventions that can help achieve them.



WHAT YOU CAN DO	HOW IT HELPS
<p>Partner with schools and Further Education colleges to embed essential skills within activities and curriculum-linked interventions.</p> <p>Provide coaching on essential skills and digital skills to disadvantaged groups, e.g., through BITC's Job Coaching Programme.</p> <p>Develop work preparation activities for non-English speakers which embed sector-based English language and engage business volunteers in mentoring to improve language skills through conversation.</p>	<p>Jobseekers have the skills needed for work</p>
<p>Form partnerships with support organisations to raise awareness of the range of interventions that you provide.</p>	<p>Jobseekers are aware of the training and development opportunities on offer</p>
<p>Attend careers fairs, present at schools or to community groups, or partner with JobCentrePlus.</p>	<p>Jobseekers are aware of the breadth of careers available to them</p>
<p>Run employability workshops covering interview skills, search and applying for jobs online, building LinkedIn profiles and developing CVs.</p>	<p>Candidates have the skills to confidently search and apply for jobs</p>
<p>Provide work readiness training (punctuality, confidence, workplace expectations, etc.)</p> <p>Mentor or coach jobseekers.</p>	<p>Candidates understand what will be expected of them in the workplace</p>
<p>Offer work placements.</p> <p>Deliver sector-specific training.</p> <p>Run company insight days.</p>	<p>Jobseekers have a good understanding of the sectors that they are interested in</p>

Further BITC guidance: [Quality Work Placements in the New Normal](#)

CASE STUDY: BITC'S JOB COACHING AMBITION

BITC's Job Coaching Programme engages businesses across the UK to support disadvantaged jobseekers through a series of coaching sessions. Our ambition is to address the unemployment issues arising from the pandemic, supporting people at risk of being left behind as the country recovers, and helping to build back an inclusive workforce.

Businesses are asked to offer their employees a volunteering opportunity to become coaches. Once fully trained, each coach is matched with a jobseeker to provide support via six one-to-one sessions which will help to improve their skills, confidence, and employment opportunities.

We aim to have supported 10,000 jobseekers through the programme by 2024.

CASE STUDY: JTI

JTI's work on employment for excluded groups came about as part of its People & Culture strategy, aligned to creating a diverse and inclusive culture within the organisation. It felt that a focus on excluded groups would help to attract candidates, open up new talent pools and contribute to its sustainability targets. The transferable skills that ex-military personnel have to offer led JTI to focus particularly on this group, with the knowledge that working-age veterans are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their civilian contemporaries.

"We wanted to understand the military landscape, so we were in the best possible position to attract and retain ex-military talent," said Emma Rees, Business Partnering Lead Manager at JTI. JTI set out to find a delivery partner who could share this expertise and, with the help of BITC, identified Mission Motorsport as a key partner.

"Having a delivery partner was fantastic for us. They helped us to find out where to start and who to connect with. We've been able to widen our network, raise awareness of us as a Top Employer and boost employee engagement."

Since embarking on its journey, JTI has signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant and grown its network considerably. JTI's Inspiring & Hiring programme includes attending jobs fairs, holding company Insight Days, offering short-term work placements, as well as job shadowing and coaching for ex-Armed Forces personnel and military spouses. It has changed its recruitment practices to make job descriptions more accessible, offers support on preparing for interviews and guarantees interviews for ex-military candidates who meet the essential criteria.

JTI has made armed forces-friendly recruitment part of the way it does business and has been awarded the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award for its support to the defence and armed forces community.

TOP TIPS FOR OTHER BUSINESSES

- You need buy-in from the very top, but you also need to focus on why you're doing this.
- Finding the right delivery partner is crucial to giving you the knowledge and the networks that you need.
- Bringing employees along with you and having them involved in activities not only helps embed this within the business, but also boosts employee engagement.



CASE STUDY: IHG SKILLS ACADEMY

IHG Hotels & Resorts has been offering people work experience and life skills through its Academy since 2004. In late 2021, it expanded the programme by launching IHG Skills Academy, an online learning platform which offers free education courses and opportunities for people looking to build their confidence and get employment ready.

Working with its partner, Learning Pool, and leading national and international organisations including the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, St Mungo's, Barnardo's and Only a Pavement Away, IHG aims to support hundreds of thousands of people globally over the next decade who face barriers to education and training. It will focus on school leavers and young people, disabled people, people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, ex-military, carers, survivors of modern slavery and people experiencing homelessness.

As Andrew Francks, IHG's Director of Global Talent and Performance explains: *"Being at the heart of so many communities, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to use our education and employability programmes to help build jobseekers' confidence, aspiration and skills and move towards a future career. Running alongside our ongoing face-to-face development programmes, the digital learning platform will allow us to help many more people during the pandemic and beyond."*

The Skills Academy is also helping IHG to support a sustainable pipeline of talent for the hospitality industry by developing new features for the digital platform which will enable the business to tailor and fast-track the recruitment process for participants who have completed certain modules. IHG is also working with its business and supply chain partners to explore online and in-person opportunities for participants in sectors beyond the hospitality industry.

HIRE

Supporting individuals to improve their employability skills and increase their knowledge of the opportunities available to them is only the first step towards better employment outcomes for disadvantaged groups. Businesses also need to break down the barriers that some of their own recruitment practices present to ensure that all jobseekers, regardless of their background or life experience, can access the jobs on offer.

- Two-thirds of employers ask for previous experience for entry-level roles.^{xi}
- 70% of employers ask about criminal records on their application forms.^{xx}
- 58% of employers say that being homeless would have a negative impact on a jobseeker's application.^{xxi}

In February 2022, BITC launched a three-year campaign which calls on businesses to remove barriers from their recruitment processes. The *Opening Doors* campaign has five high-level principles, each of which are underpinned by specific, measurable actions.

Employers wanting to sign up to the campaign must identify a minimum of three specific actions that they will take forward. You can find more information about our [Opening Doors campaign here](#).



PRINCIPLE	SPECIFIC ACTIONS
<p>Create partnerships which connect people from disadvantaged groups to your jobs</p>	<p>Identify the disadvantaged group(s) that you want to support into roles within your own business.</p> <p>Build partnerships with support organisations working with people from that disadvantaged group to help you create effective pathways into work and maximise your long-term impact.</p>
<p>Show candidates that you're committed to inclusion</p>	<p>Ensure that your job adverts reach excluded and diverse talent by advertising through a range of channels, e.g., Jobcentre Plus and recruitment partners that target diverse groups.</p> <p>Make sure that your employees understand your commitment and provide training on inclusive recruitment for those involved in hiring.</p> <p>Engage your suppliers, including recruitment agencies, on inclusive recruitment and ensure that they adhere to your inclusive recruitment ambitions.</p> <p>Publish your value statement(s) and all diversity pledges and commitments made (e.g. BITC's Race at Work Charter and Disability Confident) on your website and in recruitment literature.</p> <p>Use diverse images and role models in all your public-facing communications.</p>
<p>Make sure job descriptions and adverts are comprehensive and use inclusive language</p>	<p>Remove jargon and use neutral language.</p> <p>Include all essential information in the job description, including salary, working hours and location.</p> <p>Provide information about relevant HR policies, e.g., flexible working or the recruitment of people with convictions.</p> <p>Be as clear as you can about what the job will involve on a day-to-day basis.</p> <p>Make it clear to applicants what the different stages of the application process will be and the associated timeframes.</p>

<p>Focus on the essential skills and capabilities that are needed to do the job</p>	<p>Ask for skills rather than experience and qualifications where possible.</p> <p>Only ask for skills that are really needed, and at the level that the role requires (e.g., does the candidate really need ‘excellent’ communication skills?)</p> <p>Recognise non-traditional or informal work experience (e.g., volunteering).</p> <p>Consider whether any qualifications and experience that are required must have been gained in the UK, or if you can accept non-UK equivalents.</p> <p>Review the stages of the application and assessment processes to make sure that they are appropriate (e.g., is an interview the best way to assess the skills that you are looking for?)</p>
<p>Prioritise accessibility and eliminate bias</p>	<p>Remove the question about criminal records from application forms (as per our Ban the Box campaign).</p> <p>Include diverse colleagues on interview panels.</p> <p>Encourage the disclosure of disabilities or a need for reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Advertise and accept applications across different media (i.e., not just online).</p> <p>Stipulate in job adverts where a role can be done flexibly and the different forms of flexibility that will be considered (e.g., compressed hours, job shares, etc.)</p> <p>Provide information in accessible formats.</p> <p>Ensure that the application process doesn’t preclude jobseekers applying on their mobile phone.</p> <p>Collect diversity data at application stage to ensure that you can measure and audit any potential barriers for diverse candidates.</p>

CASE STUDY: M&S RECRUITING DIFFERENTLY

Marks & Spencer (M&S) has supported the employment of excluded groups for years through its Marks & Start programme. M&S has worked with various national partners over the years and supported more than 28,000 people who face a number of barriers to getting into work, for example, those at risk of homelessness, people with disabilities, young people, and those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Candidates are supported in their preparation for work by the partner organisations and then spend 2-4 weeks on a work experience placement with M&S.

As well as learning the operational requirements of the role, candidates receive ongoing feedback, supervision, and support from store teams, as well as mentoring and pastoral care from the partner organisations. When their placement is over, they have a review with their manager and programme partner and can then move immediately into a job if the opportunity is there.

“What we’ve effectively done is removed a barrier in the hiring process by scrapping the traditional hiring process for these groups. The work placements are so helpful for people that have been excluded, lack confidence and might not get through a traditional recruitment process. This helps us recruit good people, just in a different way,” says Heather Graham, Talent Support Partner.

“It’s a two-way street also: it helps to give candidates an idea of whether retail is right for them and sometimes it isn’t, so we don’t consider it a failure when candidates don’t take up jobs here because we’ve helped them understand what they want to do.”

Recruiting this way has contributed to the diversity of the business as participants tend to come from more diverse ethnic backgrounds, are younger (the partnership with The Prince’s Trust supports a large number of 18-25 year-olds) and they find that more men are recruited into roles that are currently predominantly female. After years of running the programme, it has now become business as usual for M&S which considers the programme to simply be an alternative method of recruitment rather than a philanthropic programme.

Heather says that the reason it has been such a success is because the programme promotes itself. *“It’s about hearts and minds. The best way to engage people in this programme is to help them actually meet people that have been through it. When you see the difference it makes to people’s lives, people want to support it all the way.”*

CASE STUDY: THAMES WATER, BAN THE BOX AND BEYOND

Thames Water's skills strategy seeks to use the untapped talent in the communities that it serves. At the end of 2020, it identified people with convictions as one of its priorities, and Ban the Box was seen as an effective step towards making its recruitment processes more inclusive for this group.

As a regulated industry, Thames Water is required to follow stringent recruitment procedures laid down by the regulator. But as Gosia Dworska, Thames Water's Employment & Skills Manager, explains: *"Ban the Box doesn't preclude you from asking about convictions at all, but rather requires that you take a risk-based approach. You can still uphold the recruitment standards of regulated industries by asking about previous convictions at a later stage in the process, when necessary."*

"At Thames Water, we believe that priority should be placed on using the recruitment process to get an understanding of the value that each individual applicant can bring to your organisation – and that can't be done if we sift people out at application stage because of one tick."

For Thames Water, Ban the Box is just the first step towards helping people with convictions secure good work. Having signed up to the campaign, the water company decided to go further and proactively market job opportunities to people with convictions via a partnership with Key for Life, a charity that runs an employability support programme for young men coming out of custody. The programme works with prison leavers over the course of several months to develop their skills and confidence. Candidates are then invited to take part in two or three-day work trials to see if they are ready for work.

"This was a great success," says Gosia. "For every candidate that took part in the work trials, the manager wanted to offer them a job".

Connecting people with convictions to job opportunities is something that Gosia urges all Ban the Box employers to do. *"Employers should be thinking about how they can proactively target people with convictions, rather than just signing up to Ban the Box and waiting to see what happens. Look for workplace programmes to develop and support people with convictions through their journey and, most importantly, create the success stories that will then inspire other parts of your business to get involved."*

Further BITC guidance:

[**Ban the Box: Fair recruitment of people with criminal convictions – a practical guide for employer**](#)



GROW

The support that can be provided to improve the employment outcomes of disadvantaged groups extends beyond simply offering jobs; employers should also consider interventions to help with the transition to employment. Some new employees, particularly those moving into work after a long period of unemployment, may need short-term help meeting the costs of living as they transition off Government benefits. New recruits, more generally, may need more support to feel included, as well as ongoing personal development and career progression.

- One-third of employees have missed work because they can't afford their travel costs.^{xxii}
- Two-thirds of working carers have given up work opportunities because of their caring commitments.^{xxiii}
- 82% of HR professionals are concerned about the impact of Covid-19 on people's mental health.^{xxiv}

The table overleaf lists key examples of in-work support. While these interventions are predominately business-led, the third sector can play a powerful supporting role.



WHAT YOU CAN DO	HOW IT HELPS
<p>Offer to cover some upfront expenses, e.g., travel costs, to address the barrier of moving from benefits to work.</p> <p>Offer flexible working arrangements to allow people returning to work to scale their hours up as appropriate.</p>	<p>Employees feel supported throughout their transition to work</p>
<p>Train all staff on how to be more inclusive and the importance of an inclusive culture.</p> <p>Encourage the development of employee networks to provide peer support to individuals.</p> <p>Operate a ‘buddy’ scheme.</p> <p>Nurture an environment where people can talk about mental health.</p>	<p>Employees feel included and supported at work</p>
<p>Offer fair pay and benefits, paying at least the real Living Wage for all roles.</p> <p>Maximise job security and review the structure and content of roles to improve wellbeing.</p> <p>Provide accessible progression pathways and equip employees with the skills needed to thrive.</p>	<p>Employees’ basic needs for ‘good work’ are met</p>
<p>Provide training and development opportunities, including reskilling in preparation for digital disruptions (where appropriate) and career mentors.</p> <p>Conduct mid-career reviews to enable employees to identify appropriate career goals and development opportunities.</p>	<p>Employees are developed throughout their careers</p>
<p>Offer flexible working arrangements to allow employees with caring responsibilities to stay in work.</p>	<p>Employees can balance work with external demands</p>

HOW TO INSPIRE, HIRE & GROW DIVERSE TALENT

Encourage employees to disclose reasonable adjustments (e.g., specific equipment, access to a quiet space).

Develop policies to support employees who are working from home or hybrid working.

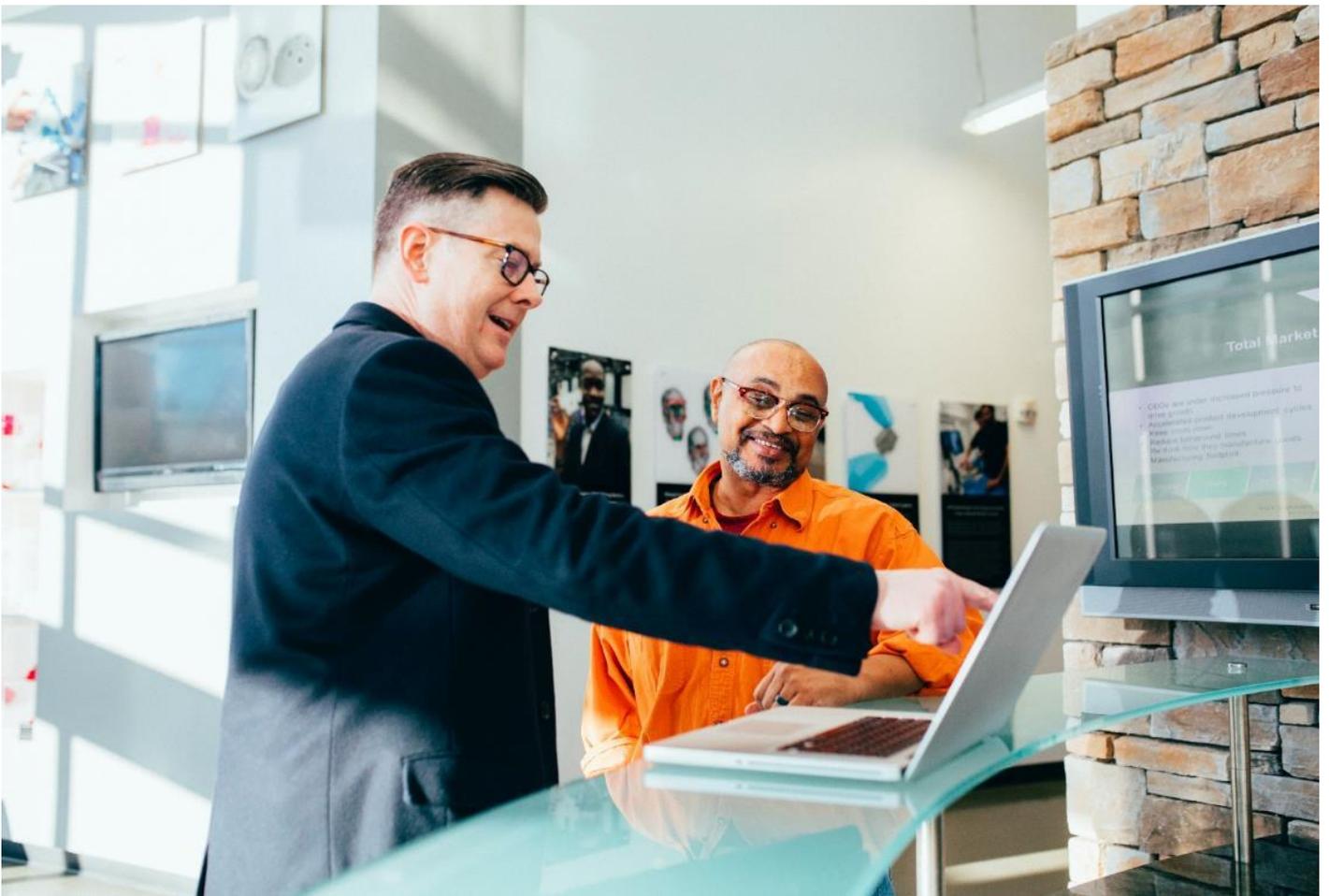
Employees are at ease in the workplace

Further BITC guidance

[*Ensuring Everyone Benefits: Improving financial wellbeing through employee benefits that work for everyone*](#)

[*What If Your Job Was Good For You: a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform mental health and wellbeing at work report.*](#)

[*How to Conduct Mid-Life Career Reviews: A Guide for Line Managers*](#)



CASE STUDY: HOW CAPITA ACTIVELY ENGAGED YOUTH VOICES

The significant impact of the pandemic on young people prompted Capita to reimagine its approach towards engaging its young employees.

“We know that home and hybrid working can really affect people’s mental health,” explains Lisa Pinfield, Group Head of Talent and Succession at Capita. “For young people who are just entering the workplace, the absence of physical events and opportunities to socialise with colleagues has made it difficult for them to form those social networks which are so important to workplace wellbeing.”

“Working in partnership with The Youth Group, we’ve introduced a Young Council – a 10-person strong team which includes three of our young employees and seven external young people, who meet to discuss youth-related business issues to inform Capita’s approach to supporting young people. The Youth Council quickly introduced a Youth Employee Network Group to bring young people together to network, discuss and deal with challenges together.”

Capita has also launched ‘Safe Spaces to Work’, a pilot project in partnership with the Youth Group which involves opening dedicated ‘safe spaces’ for young people at two of its London offices, where young people from either organisation can meet and network with other young people and have that social interaction that has been made so difficult by the pandemic. If the pilot proves successful, Capita will look to expand the initiative out to other employers too.

“Starting a new job can be daunting for anyone, but particularly young people for whom this is their first experience of work, so providing effective pastoral care is also an important part of Capita’s offering,” explains Lisa. “Each of our apprentices is given a buddy, a mentor and an apprenticeship coach as well as a line manager, so they should feel well-supported from day one.

“We’re committed to making sure that post-pandemic Capita is a really positive place for young people to work. It’s the right thing to do for young people, it’s the right thing to do for communities, and ultimately it’s the right thing to do for our business.”



FOUR STEPS TO GET STARTED

1

GET BUY-IN

Make sure you have senior-level support as well as champions within the business.

2

GET TO KNOW YOUR TARGET GROUPS

Find out what changes will make the most difference

3

PUT INTERVENTIONS IN PLACE

Work across teams to communicate and implement changes across the business.

4

KNOW WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Establish where you are, where you want to be, and how you will know when you get there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In November 2021, BITC invited a range of stakeholders representing different disadvantaged groups to a co-creation session. We wanted to understand whether the employment barriers that we'd identified in our original guide were still relevant, and whether new ones had emerged during the pandemic.

We are very grateful to the following organisations for their input:

- St Giles
- Single Homeless Project
- Leonard Cheshire
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Back on Track Manchester
- Youth Employment UK

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Talk to one of our expert team today to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further and drive lasting global change.

ENDNOTES

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